



May 31, 2000

Ms. Kristi LaRoe
Assistant District Attorney
Tarrant County
Office of Criminal District Attorney
401 West Belknap
Fort Worth, Texas 76196-0201

OR2000-2125

Dear Ms. LaRoe

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 135664.

Tarrant County (the "county") received a request for the district attorney's case file regarding cause number 0234636D. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.103, and 552.111 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

First, we note that the submitted documents also contain documents that appear to have been filed with a court. Documents filed with a court are generally considered public. *See Star-Telegram, Inc. v. Walker*, 834 S.W.2d 54, 57 (Tex. 1992). Moreover, section 552.022(a)(17) requires the release of information that is also contained in a public court document. Gov't Code § 552.022(a)(17). Thus, the county must release to the requestor all documents that have been filed with a court. We have marked the types of documents to be released.

Next, we address your contention that all the information submitted to this office for review is protected as attorney work product. In Open Records Decision No. 647 (1996), this office held that a governmental body may withhold information under section 552.111 of the Government Code if the governmental body can show 1) that the information was created for civil trial or in anticipation of civil litigation under the test articulated in *National Tank v. Brotherton*, 851 S.W.2d 193 (Tex. 1993), or after a civil lawsuit is filed, and (2) that the work product consists of or tends to reveal an attorney's "mental processes, conclusions, and legal theories." Open Records Decision No. 647 at 5 (1996). The work product doctrine is applicable to litigation files in criminal as well as civil litigation. *Curry v. Walker*, 873 S.W.2d 379, 381 (Tex. 1994) (citing *United States v. Nobles*, 422 U.S. 225, 236 (1975)). In *Curry*, the Texas Supreme Court held that a request for a district attorney's "entire file"

was “too broad” and, citing *National Union Fire Insurance Co. v. Valdez*, 863 S.W.2d 458, 460 (Tex. 1993), held that “the decision as to what to include in [the file] necessarily reveals the attorney’s thought processes concerning the prosecution or defense of the case.” *Curry*, 873 S.W.2d at 380.

Here, the requestor seeks the district attorney’s entire file pertaining to cause number 0234636D. Because the requestor in this instance seeks all the information in a particular file, we agree that, except for the court documents discussed above, the county may withhold all of the requested information pursuant to section 552.111 of the Government Code as attorney work product.¹

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov’t Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

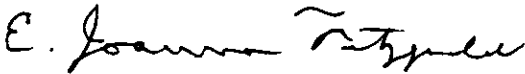
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body’s intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general’s Open Government Hotline, toll free, at 877/673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

¹Because section 552.111 is dispositive of this matter, we do not address your other arguments except to note that section 552.103 does not except court documents from public disclosure. See Gov’t Code § 552.022(a)(17). Moreover, the court documents that must be released do not contain confidential information and are therefore not excepted from public disclosure under section 552.101. See *id.*

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.-Austin 1992, no writ).

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



E. Joanna Fitzgerald
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

EJF\nc

Ref: ID# 135664

Encl: Submitted documents

cc: Ms. Cynthia Russell Henley
Schaffer & Henley
1301 McKinney, Suite 3100
Houston, Texas 77010
(w/o enclosures)